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REPORT FROM BRITAIN

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Glasgow, Scotland
November 21, 1949

One acre out of three of Scotland's farming area consists of marginal and submarginal land which now produces ten percent of the gross output of Scottish farms. The target is to increase production so as to provide maximum help in Britain's desperate effort to feed herself.

After a two year study the Marginal Land Committee of the Scottish Farmers' Union has proposed "the amalgamation of uneconomic marginal land farms into larger units to make their working economically sound." As an alternative to amalgamation the committee proposes a planned rural economy which will allow marginal farmers to augment their income from such sources as fishing, forestry, rural crafts, and industrial development.

The committee's short term proposals include the continuation of present subsidies to farmers plus assistance by grants up to 75% for grassland improvements. Today the British farmer receives subsidies for the production of potatoes (\$22.40 to \$32.60 per acre), wheat and rye (\$8.40 per acre), sheep, horses, and cattle. He receives something over \$16.00 for each acre of grassland ploughed and sown to approved crops before the end of the year. Grants are made by the government toward the cost of drainage projects, the use of certain fertilizers, and the eradication of pests. In fact, if they're not too busy, the experts of the Department of Agriculture will drop around to help get rid of a farmer's rats or moles.

Prices of farm products are rigidly controlled but the farmers don't kick because they have fared exceptionally well in this controlled society. In fact many normally conservative agriculturalists have swung to the support of the Labor government. Food prices are slightly lower over here than in the United States, due mainly to further subsidization of the consumer. The Brannan plan has been in operation in Britain for quite some time.

As in many parts of the American South, the hill lands of Scotland can carry a great many more cattle than have been grazed on them in the past. In Inverness-shire Lord Lovat of Commando fame is now grazing more than six hundred cattle on land which was supporting only forty three years ago.

He hopes to develop his herd to a thousand head, all of which is entirely academic to the present writer whose only connection with the word steak is one of fond remembrance.

A main obstacle in the way of upping agricultural production is the growing scarcity of farm labor. More than a thousand male workers were lost to Scottish farming last year - at a time of considerable expansion.

America's chief farming problem is overproduction (or adjustment to the profitable market). Britain's greatest need is the production of more and more food and raw materials. Strange as it may seem, both countries use the same means to achieve opposite ends; in America we subsidize to cut down production, in Britain they subsidize to increase production.

Right now raisins are fast becoming non-existent over here because of the failure of the Australian crop. At the same time the United States government is paying out millions of dollars so that California raisins may be turned into hog food, which reminds me once more of one of the elemental facts of this modern world we live in: the presence of a thousand starving children is of no economic importance to the owner of a thousand quarts of milk or loaves of bread -- unless the children have the cash or its equivalent to plank down on the barrel head for the food they desire.
